

Education Governance Responses
Grand Isle Meeting (2/7/07) - Grand Isle School Cafeteria

56 Attendees (facilitated by Robin Scheu)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

People know their community: School Board, Distance, Family feel
Parents involved with school
School is focal point for town
High School choice
Ownership
Oversight
Accountability
“Local control”
Better representation for smaller schools
Know your families & their needs
Multiple board members represent broader views
Principal & board work closely together
“It takes an SU to raise a child”
Small school – small community – small governance
If towns are taxed individually, then boards can respond individually according to the financial situation
Community control
School facility serves as community center
Minimal transportation costs
Closer interaction possibilities w/faculty/staff
“Change” comes easier
Pride
Control over hiring principal and policies
React quickly to local issues

Disadvantages

Large issues interpreted by few
Hard to get to Superintendent
Territorial attitudes
Inefficient governance structure
Run independently
Less likely to respond to popular changes
No diversity in classes
Lack of culture
Schools to 6th grade – students kept from older pupils
Very expensive
Gold town with limited programs
No high school
No governance over high school kids
Hard to put together a local school board (little competition/interest)

Superintendent stretched too thin
Excessive administration
Duplication of effort
Lack of coordinated (district-wide) planning
Can't share staff & resources
Principal has many bosses
Contract negotiations distract
Too much management – facilities
Time spent deciding costs for S.U. programs
Answering to too many board members
Lack of consistency school to school because of individual funding
Expense
Top heavy management
Differently prepared students
Lack of communication w/public at large
Community as a whole (school boards don't get together often enough for union-wide issues)
Septic capacity of facilities limits building and enrollment'
High school choice and resulting board accountability of students
Smaller schools cannot offer better curriculum choices
Low communication with other boards
Lack of money
Act 60/68

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

More efficient
Better communication between towns
Cost savings(?)
Less people to deal with
Better use of Supt. time
Less expensive
Does not disrupt town boundaries
Allows more productive grants/curriculum
Evaluations of students/staff
Supt. appoint principals – better to meet each school's needs
Competition increased for board positions – better quality candidates – encourage leadership by persuasion
Increased visibility of board candidates
Unified contracts
Economies of Scale
More consistency with curriculum, policies, programs
Offer possibility of more comprehensive school board training (better access)
Fewer meetings
Easier to share staff and resources
Accounting/financial stuff streamlined
Collective bargaining with a single unit (more bargaining power)
Standardized school spending between communities within a district

Transportation costs
Extra curricular activities
Small school closing could be cost effective
More likely to have a high school
EEE and other SU programs
Simplicity of flow chart
Pool of superintendents “grows” due to fewer meetings, etc.
Proposal at least fosters the discussion about VT’s educational system

Disadvantages

Where is the money savings?
Loss of control/voting
Loss of individual school identity
No creativity
Could bring about loss of school
Children disconnect with community
Transportation costs could increase
Small schools do not have a voice (Veto needed for local control)
How will this save money?
Lack of personal attention/ability to respond to parents/community members
Less control for smaller schools if membership is weighted by school population
Require more time of an unpaid school board
Lack of close knowledge of situations & individual interest
Segregation of certain populations
Could lose Pre-K to 8 configuration
Possible longer bus rides for small kids
School board member could become politicized. Lose volunteer participation
Town meeting
Greater apathy because of perceived disconnect
Lose high school choice
Regionalism can reduce localism
“Super” or “Power” board issues

Debrief Comments:

Who has budget authority?
Do individual schools/towns vote on their own budget?
How would per pupil costs be calculated?
Would the money follow the students?
Base voting power on student population or equally among districts?
Is this the first step in consolidating the schools?
School consolidation to improve curriculum offerings and achieve more cost-effective student/teacher ratio
Form a separate middle school to better prepare students for high school. (To allow for foreign language, higher math, Algebra, lab sciences)
Allow Grand Isle County Schools to have affordable, but equal curriculums as other VT schools
Develop criteria for board membership
Arrange for school board training outside of M-F, 9-5 model
Increased stipend for board membership
Important to have recall provision for board

Two members per town – cover illness, staggered terms to create institutional memory
Cut down on number of principals
Analysis of grade consolidation within island communities is amenable
Choice of high school needs to be made locally, not at the state level
Don't lose the kids in the process!
The state could offer money/incentives for the towns to consolidate – school boards to consolidate
Act 68 penalizes small schools – if you want to keep the advantages of small schools, the state could offer incentives...
What is your intention to do next? In North Hero & Isle LaMotte have the least amount of students and are only able to give our children the barest education. We are being penalized; our children are being penalized because of where we live. Our children in these two towns deserve your attention and help.
We as boards are forced to send our children to other schools to give them things we can't afford.
When are you starting the next step?
What benefits will come to our children?
What cost savings?
Protections written in for small towns (school closing only with vote?)
Encourage development of magnet schools.
How does budget voting occur?
Would bigger towns hold more weight?
What are other rural states (NH, ME) doing & how does it work?
Common level of appraisal? How would this work? Towns with high & low levels – how does it affect tax rate, especially in lower town?
What's the plural of rhombus?
Repeal Act 60 and 68
Raise educational funds from income tax only – to keep community diverse
Add economies of scale (i.e. Per pupil costs)
Revised formula for per pupil cost in rural towns
We need a high school in Grand Isle County
Would our present SU be merged with any other educational districts outside the county?
Equitable taxing formula to support the new governance structure
We have so many schools for Grand Isle County – our kids in high school are not in our community they are in other schools in and out of our state.
I would like to see fewer schools - a high school for our kids.
I have not had to deal with the school board or the superintendent, so I think what they are doing is fine. If it's better for our kids, then let's change it.
Question about how this will save money?
What is the rest of the plan? This proposal seems like the first step of a larger plan – be transparent.
GISU has much larger staff than 10 years ago – how will this proposal impact increasing administrations?
Important question is not how to save money, but how to improve education quality.
Have people thought about what this proposal will look like 5-10 years down the road? Develop long-term strategic plan?
Concern that distribution of resources isn't equitable
G.I. communities forced to subsidize programs for other towns that G.I. can't afford for their own kids.

Not enough attention paid to the needs of G.I. schools

Supervisory union boundaries remain the same (i.e., including So. Hero, Grand Isle, No. Hero, Isle LaMotte, and Alburg)

Maintain school choice for high school until such time as the Island communities opt to change that choice (i.e., opt to designate a high school(s) or construct their own high school).

Acceptable to consider reducing the number of school districts from 5 to 1 (i.e., reorganizing the current GISU board to serve as a single board for all individual town school districts and regional GISU related issues). Board composition needs to be proportionally weighted but not on a “one town, one person with weighted voting power” basis. Instead, it should be weighted such that a member’s voting power is equal to all other members of the board (e.g., representative population or number of enrolled children). Perhaps a local oversight citizen panel (comprised of the representative school board members and an additional number of citizens) could be appointed by the single board to provide recommendation to the GISU specific to local decisions (e.g., principal search process, building facility changes, etc.)

Acknowledge that the VT Ed Reform indeed has changed the method of financing education, for better or worse; however, the quality of education remains disproportional around the state (e.g., Williston can afford to provide a wireless computer network with laptop computers, Grand Isle Town cannot) and, thus additional reform is necessary.

Amenable to single teacher contract and support staff contract for all communities in supervisory union.

Amenable to existing Superintendent serving as CEO and curriculum leader. However, principals would be hired by the GISU with process conducted by local panel in concert with the Superintendent. Agree with no change to process for hiring other faculty/staff positions.

Amenable to parents (not students) choosing which public school students will attend, including out of state schools with proper public school “status.” Within a time certain, local panel and respective principal should have opportunity to provide local insight, etc. as to appropriateness of issues related to curriculum, faculty capacity, transportation, and other issues the panel deems important.

Amenable to enabling further consolidation in VT law, but only on an incentive basis not as a mandate process.